

VZCZCXYZ0016
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHKB #0674/01 1931505
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 111505Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5698
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 2924
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1032

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 000674

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/10/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ALIYEV SAYS NO COUNTRY HAS RIGHT TO
INTERFERE IN AZERBAIJAN

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse per 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a speech delivered to the biannual conference of all Azerbaijani heads of diplomatic missions, President Aliyev pushed for a strong public diplomacy effort to bolster Azerbaijan's position in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, presented a confident vision of Azerbaijan's place in the world, and sternly warned that interference from other countries in Azerbaijani internal affairs was unacceptable. The speech is yet another sign of an increasingly assertive Azerbaijani foreign policy, a growing intolerance of criticism from outside powers, and a circling of the wagons in advance of October presidential elections. End summary.

PUSH PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH

¶2. (SBU) The first part of the speech focused heavily on public diplomacy efforts. Aliyev stressed that in the early 1990s few people knew about Azerbaijan, which hindered diplomatic efforts. However, Azerbaijan has bolstered its image, increasing the country's ability to protect its interests through foreign policy. Aliyev emphasized that public diplomacy is an essential component for resolving the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, which he stressed remains the top issue in Azerbaijan's foreign policy at the bilateral and multilateral level. He noted that Azerbaijan has improved its media image but said that anti-Azerbaijani bias remains due to strong Armenian lobbying efforts. Aliyev told his diplomatic representatives to raise consistently what he called Armenia's "occupation policy" in official circles, in public statements, and with the media. Arguing that Azerbaijan has every reason to tell the truth about this issue, he said that diplomatic representatives should be attacking the issue on a daily basis, particularly because the Armenian side will continue to push their message in the media.

¶3. (SBU) Aliyev reaffirmed Azerbaijan's participation in Minsk Group negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh and stressed that independence for the region is not on the agenda. He noted that the negotiations have led to some advances, particularly the commitment to territorial integrity, but underlined that these advances needed to yield real results. Noting that the position of the new Armenian Government remains unclear and that it needs time to create stability, he also argued that Armenia had to take the next steps in the negotiations. Azerbaijan has offered the highest level of autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh and is unwilling to compromise further.

DOUBLE-STANDARDS AND INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS

¶4. (SBU) In the second half of the speech, President Aliyev took a much more critical stance. He noted that Azerbaijan has joined a number of international organizations and is committed to fulfilling all of its obligations to these groups, specifically focusing on the Council of Europe. He

stressed that Azerbaijan had voluntarily joined the Council of Europe and wants to use the organization to adopt the positive experiences of the most developed European countries. Nevertheless, he believes that the organization applies a double standard to Azerbaijan, arguing that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe discusses issues such as democracy and human rights in Azerbaijan at length while ignoring other CIS states (notably Russia) that have joined the group. Admitting that Azerbaijan has not yet completed all it needs to do, he also said that even those countries that consider themselves symbols of democracy still have work to do. The speech acknowledges that Azerbaijan has chosen the path of integration with the West and European organizations, but that it will only continue to follow this path if the Government believes it will be in Azerbaijan's best interests.

15. (SBU) Having criticized what he sees as double standards for Azerbaijan, President Aliyev stressed that his diplomatic corps should not concern itself with the internal affairs of other countries. He argued that Azerbaijan's foreign policy does not allow for such interference, and he expects other states to exercise the same restraint. According to Aliyev, Azerbaijan has not given any state the right to interfere in internal affairs or to lecture Azerbaijan. Aliyev asked the audience rhetorically who helped Azerbaijan when it faced difficult circumstances in 1993, prior to Heydar Aliyev coming to power, and who gave advice when the country had no money. He stressed that Azerbaijan had solved its own problems then and did not need advice from other countries now. To stress this sense of independence, Aliyev asked a rhetorical question: "What will happen if we are not part of an international organization? Will Azerbaijan collapse?"

Aliyev tried to balance this criticism of the international community by stressing that he supports friendly relations with all countries. But these relationships must be mutual, and the Government will neither accept nor ignore any groundless measures taken by another state against Azerbaijan.

16. (SBU) Political commentator for the local Zerkalo newspaper Rauf Mirgadirov told the Embassy that he believes the speech, while focused on foreign policy, was for domestic consumption. He argued that it was a signal to the opposition that the President was willing to pursue whatever he wants domestically without worrying about his international image. He believes the speech stemmed from Aliyev's exaggerated sense of importance based on increased oil revenues, arguing that the President is increasingly confident and comfortable.

COMMENT:

17. (C) President Aliyev's speech demonstrates his increasing confidence in Azerbaijan's position in the world, driven by huge oil revenues and increased attention due to developing gas projects. Yet, this confidence is mixed with a sense of uncertainty and persecution. Aliyev clearly believes that international organizations are overly quick to criticize Azerbaijan for infringements on democracy and human rights while ignoring violations in similar states, like Armenia and Georgia. He is also sensitive to other states, including by implication the United States, interfering in Azerbaijan's domestic matters. His sensitivity is sharpened due to the proximity of the October presidential elections.

18. (C) Aliyev seems to believe that Azerbaijan has reached a status in the world that the international community is failing to acknowledge and accept, and the clear frustration in the speech likely emanates from this lack of acknowledgment as well as the apparent conviction that Azerbaijan is treated with double standards. The GOAJ will become more assertive and sensitive to criticism from outside powers in bilateral and multilateral fora, particularly as the election draws closer.

DERSE